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ABSTRACT

A written broadcasting internship contract has proved to serve the best interests of the intern, the school, and the radio or television station. Among other things, such a contract can specify the commitments of the intern and the advisors, the hours and times of station work, the academic credit to be earned, and the learning experiences to be encountered. The binding nature of the written contract compels the fulfillment of the obligations of all parties and the quality of learning is superior to that in a no contract situation. (An appendix contains a modified sample of an internship contract with a radio station.) (JM)

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BROADCASTING STUDENT INTERNSHIPS: PUT THEM IN WRITING

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After arranging and supervising Broadcasting student internships for the past four years, I have concluded that putting internship activities into contractual form with radio or TV stations is very desirable. Last year, I used internship contracts with two interns working in WLYV Radio's news department, Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was reluctant to use contracts at first after three years of informal agreements with stations in internship situations. However, after I had worked with internship contracts for a year, I saw their value.

Here are some reasons why I think a written internship contract will serve the best interests of the intern, the school, and the radio or TV station:

1. Where some student individual study plans may be "hatched off the cuff" by instructors in a matter of minutes, without much prior organization or thought, the internship contract reveals that a planning period has taken place between the intern's faculty supervisor and the station representative. Further, the signed contract is evidence that in-person contacts with station personnel have been made by the faculty supervisor in the planning of the internship and that continuing contacts will be made between the two as intern progress checks are made.
2. It is stated in the contract that the actual time periods worked in a station should not interfere with the intern's attendance at his regularly scheduled classes at school; likewise, the intern's commitment to a station should not affect his plans for gainful employment elsewhere.

3. Specifications are written out in the contract, indicating the roles of the intern, the intern's supervisors, a precise description of the proposed internship activities, the hours and days the intern will work at the station for credit, how much hourly academic credit he will earn, the beginning and ending dates of the internship period, as well as how the intern will be evaluated and who will judge his work performance for grading purposes.

4. The contract names, specifically, who is qualified to supervise the intern in a station. In this regard, alternate supervisors are listed in case of illness, or in the event supervisors leave due to termination or because they resign.

5. The exact type and number of learning experiences an intern will encounter are described. This assures the intern of in-depth and varied job experiences before he ever begins his work at a radio or TV station.

6. Because an internship contract is signed by a station's representative and the faculty supervisor during the planning period of the internship, the intern's faculty supervisor has a written document to support a grievance if a station fails to fulfill its agreed upon responsibilities.

7. The internship contract may become a part of the intern's vita file because it shows precisely what first-hand in-station and in-the-field experience (reporting, etc.) an intern has had before he goes out to apply for a job.

8. There is a statement in the contract stipulating that the faculty supervisor is permitted to enter the station to make observations of the intern's work performance any time the intern is working in the station. This is particularly useful for viewing an intern's operational capabilities in a TV station.

9. The intern and his in-station supervisor agree to save samples of the intern's work so that the faculty supervisor may make his own periodic evaluations of the intern's DJ air checks, taped news interviews, actualities, as well as his written news copy.

10. The internship contract requires that all parties sign the agreement which is a public commitment by chose involved. Putting one's signature on a contract tends to be more binding than an informal oral internship agreement.

The above reasons for drawing up an internship contract may be converted into actual contract statements, including any additional agreements interested individuals wish to make. I hope the testimony I have given to the usefulness of a written internship contract will prove helpful for those who might need something more than just informal words of promise and handshakes--both of which may be more easily violated than a written agreement.

Until last year, I used a very informal system of organizing internships with radio and TV stations. First, I wrote to prospective stations to see if they had internship openings available. If they did, I contacted station representatives by phone and arranged to meet with

them personally to establish internship guidelines. Then, I selected students who met certain scholastic and Broadcasting performance criteria for those openings that were available.

The next step involved setting up a meeting between station representatives concerned and the students to be working as interns at a given station. If all parties were satisfied with the internship arrangement, I arranged a date for the student to begin his duties at the station and let the station decide who would supervise the intern, for the most part. All the intern had to do was write up a lengthy formal report of his learning activities during the internship at the end of the quarter. No specifics were formalized concerning the day-to-day conduct of the internship and not much periodic review of the intern's progress was carried out. There were phone calls made to intern supervisors selected by the stations to inquire about the interns' ongoing progress but no pre-established deliberations with station personnel about on-the-job observations of interns took place. In all, it was rather "loosely" organized.

Intern relationships worked out fine most of the time, depending upon the amount of attention I gave my internship obligations. But, if I had an unusually "heavy" quarter and something had to "give," I usually turned my attention to priorities which were most pressing--preparation for lectures and committee work. The quality of learning which took place in each internship situation usually depended on the self-starting capability of each intern involved. The students with the most professional drive were fine without much attention from me, but the "foot-draggers"

did the bare minimum at the stations. Of course, there should have been more intervention in the internship training on my part, but because of the informality of the internship arrangements, my department did not seem to recognize the individual study overload of mine as much as my regular classroom assignments. Thus, I had to meet the needs of "regular" work load pressures before I could pay attention to my interns and work with them more closely.

The implementation of a Broadcasting internship contract changed that organizational "looseness" to a "must do" situation. I had made a commitment to a station, in this case, and I was obliged to fulfill my internship program obligations, in spite of other intra-departmental drains on my time. I did a better job for my interns when I worked within a contractual agreement, and I think the station did a better job of supervising my interns, too.

In the last year, if I were to compare the quality of my teaching and what interns have been able to learn in an internship contract versus no internship contract situation, I would pick the former as producing the best context for Broadcasting education.

APPENDIX

The following is a modified sample of the internship contract used at WLYV Radio.

WLYV INTERNSHIP AGREEMENT (RE: JOHN DOE)

In accordance with earlier discussions of criteria for the conduct of student internships at WLYV, the Section of Communication offers the following conditions for your approval:

Academic credit: John Doe will earn two hours of academic credit in COM 431: Practicum in Radio, upon successful completion of the internship.

Duration of the internship: John's period of internship will extend from October 1, 1974 to January 7, 1975.

Hours: John will work eight hours weekly, the hours to be divided between no more than three days of the week, as follows: (1) Tuesday or Thursday 10 a.m. through 2 p.m; and (2) Friday 1 p.m. through 5 p.m. The actual time periods worked should not interfere with attendance at other regularly scheduled University classes, and, when possible, not interfere with John's plan for gainful employment.

News Activities: John will have at least two experiences in each of the following areas of radio news:

1. Reporting of governmental and community affairs meetings, such as city council or board of works or school board;
2. Assisting with election coverage (at least one experience here);
3. Routine news phone checks;
4. Coverage of city beat, such as police, jail, courthouse, and coroner;

5. Rewriting of newscasts from the wire and newspaper;

6. Field or phone interviews followed by preparation of actuality material for airing;

7. Wire copy editing for newscaster;

8. On-the-air newscasting (if John passes an audition);

9. Carting actualities from phone or taped interviews which have been conducted by other station personnel.

Supervisory responsibilities for conduct of the internship:

1. The faculty supervisor, P. Dale Ware, will confer weekly in person, or by telephone, with the News Director regarding John's progress in the internship. P. Dale Ware will use the News Director's observations in counseling or giving extra training to John, as the need arises.

2. The Station Manager will be responsible for insuring that John will be fully trained before he is authorized to perform operational activities pre-defined for him by P. Dale Ware and the News Director.

3. P. Dale Ware will be responsible for assigning John's grade, which will be based upon reports from the News Director, in-station observation by P. Dale Ware, critical evaluation of samples of John's reporting, and reviews of his log of activities; further, P. Dale Ware will serve as liaison between John and station management when there is disagreement about responsibilities and work habits.